

“Laodicea: Blowing Chunks” | *Revelation 3:14-22*

Ecclesia

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Steven Norris

One day, a pastor was out visiting members of his congregation.

He drove up to one member’s house and approached the house.

The car was in the driveway and there was a light on inside the house, so he was pretty sure that the person was home.

He approached and rang the doorbell.

Inside, he could hear a little scuffle but no one answered the door.

He waited for a moment, but realizing that someone didn’t want to see the preacher, he took out a business card and wrote on the back Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and eat with him, and he with me.”

He left, not thinking too much more about it.

The next Sunday, as the pastor was looking through the slips in the offering, he came across a business card.

He noticed Revelation 3:20 written across the back, but underneath it - another scripture

Genesis 3:10 - I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

We come today to the last of our letters in the opening chapters of Revelation.

This one to the church at Laodicea - probably the most quoted of any of the 7 letters.

As with many of the other cities we’ve looked at,

Laodicea was located at an important juncture of trade routes.

In fact, some historians have called it a “knot in the road system” because of the number of intersections.

Laodicea was most well-known for three characteristics:

Its banking system, its textiles, and its medical school.

During the Roman times, Laodicea became the wealthiest city in Phrygia.

Agricultural and commercial wealth brought much prosperity to the city.

In 60 C.E./A.D. there was a great earthquake that devastated the city.

While the Romans offered to give money to help the city rebuild, the Laodiceans refused, choosing to rebuild the city with their own wealth.

They were proud of their self-sufficiency.

The Lycus Valley, where the city was located proved to be good for grazing sheep.

The Laodiceans perfected breeding sheep with a distinct shiny, black wool that was made into a kind of tunic called a *trimita* that became famous in the region.

Finally, the medical school near Laodicea was well-known for its compound medicines to treat various kinds of diseases.

They were most famous for an ear ointment made from spice nard and an eye salve made from something known as Phrygian powder.

Laodicea was part of a triangle of cities, which included Hieropolis 6 miles to the north and Colossae only about 10 miles away (same Colossae as in Paul's letter to the Colossians)

Laodicea's major weakness was its water supply.

Usually cities are planned based on availability of water and supplies.

Laodicea had been planned based on the intersection of roads.

The water had to be brought from the surrounding area through pipes and aqueducts, making it vulnerable in times of attack.

It also made the water unsafe to drink at times, often causing sickness and other issues.

Christ addresses the church as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.”

In the opening chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, he begins with a hymn exalting Jesus as the Messiah sent by God.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

(Colossians 1:15-20 ESV)

It is likely that this was a well-known hymn of the church, echoed here in our letter to Laodicea:

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.”

“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

The nearby city of Hieropolos was well-known for their hot springs.

Many people would travel there because they believed the springs had medicinal value.

There was healing in those springs.

The nearby city of Colossae was well-known for its cold clear wells, water that would quench the thirst of weary travelers.

Laodicea had water that made you want to spit it out as soon as you tasted it.

Might I suggest this morning that Jesus is saying to this church:
Spiritually, you are just like the water situation in your region.
Church at Laodicea - you are neither a healer of the sick
nor a quencher of the thirsty

You are tepid. Lukewarm. Lazy. Ineffective. Distasteful to the Lord.

As the next verse goes on to explain, the church at Laodicea
has become blinded by their affluence
wretched in their complacency
pitiable in their

The remedy?

buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich;
and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen;
and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Did you catch the irony?

Buy gold - not the gold that fills your banks
and rebuilds your city after earthquakes.
Not the gold of successful trade.
But the spiritual gold that has been refined and will stand the test of judgement.

Buy white robes - not the beautiful black wool robes
that have brought success and wealth to your city
(success that has led to your spiritual complacency),
But robes that signify the righteousness of God that will cover our shame.

Buy salve to anoint your eyes - not the salve made by your medical school
But the salve that will remove your spiritual blindness.

The remedy?

REPENT!
It's not too late

I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

Listen Ecclesia, God desires us to be hot or cold.
to be a place of healing and a place of spiritual refreshing.

This week, I sat beside the bedside of Bill Keys.
He said time and again of how visits and phone calls and cards have ministered to him.
He talked about how Daniel brought his guitar and sang by his bedside.
He was too weak to sing along, but those songs washed over him
like soothing medicine - healing his spirit.

This week, I sat across the table from a young person,
listening to the ways he and his friends were skeptical of the church,
listening to the ways they felt they had been burned by religion.

I listened without judgment.

I listened to affirm this truth - he is created in God's image.

He and his friends are loved and valued by God.

God has a plan for his life.

I told him that I would never ask him to check his brain at the door -

to bring all his questions and objections and skepticism with him

because he is welcome here

and God's big enough to handle it.

I hope I was able to be a cup of cold water, quenching a bit of his thirst

and leading him to the well that never runs dry.

As the Spirit of God spoke to the church at Laodicea, the Spirit is saying to Ecclesia:

Invest in eternal things.

Clothe yourselves with Christ

Remove the blinders from your eyes

You are called to be a place of healing for the hurting

A place of rest for weary

A community of faith

A voice of hope

Known for love

Amen.